

Eric Balas
History 586-B, Undergraduate Research Seminar on the Crusades
Kansas State University
Spring 2013
Instructor: Prof. David Defries

Abstract

In this paper, I analyze Walter Scott's portrayal of Saladin in his novel *The Talisman*, to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the Scott's work and to more accurately understand his influence on public perceptions of the Crusades. I will argue that Scott used Saladin as a model for his vision of chivalry. Saladin is a complex character in *The Talisman* and has flaws, but fulfilled Scott's primary requirements of a refined and chivalrous warrior. Also, attention to the epic's depiction of Saladin reveals that his image of the Muslim leader is directly rooted in the works of a number of Scott's European predecessors and contemporaries. Furthermore, growing interest in the Crusades and Saladin in the nineteenth-century played a significant role in Scott's decision to utilize this topic in *The Talisman*. Finally, I contend that while Scott knew his portrayal of Saladin was fictional, he believed that the depiction was an entirely plausible one that was grounded in historical fact. All of these factors collectively reveal that Scott was motivated by a desire to create a historically believable character, but one with which he could take certain artistic liberties. Analysis of Scott's novel *The Talisman* and his depiction of Saladin offers us an intimate look into an important example of Western literature that helped mold a lasting image for popular audiences of medieval Muslims and their role in the Crusades.

The Chivalrous Saracen: Sir Walter Scott's Portrayal of Saladin in *The Talisman*

The works of nineteenth-century Scottish literary legend Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) have been enjoyed by a wide range of audiences in dozens of countries and languages, and his vivid portrayals of beloved English historical figures like Robin Hood and King Richard I continue to entertain modern audiences. Scholars have targeted specific works by Scott, such as *Waverly* and *Ivanhoe*, but his crusading epic, *The Talisman*, has been significantly overlooked. Due to this work's great popularity in the nineteenth-century and beyond, Scott's vibrant descriptions and characterizations have shaped the way Westerners perceive the Crusades to this day. In fact, Crusade historian Elizabeth Siberry has argued few literary figures in nineteenth-century Britain contributed as much to popular images of the Middle Ages as Scott.¹ Scholars identify him as a central figure in Britain's medieval revival and British Romanticism.^{2;3} Among Scott's major contributions is the enduring portrait he painted of the Muslim leader Saladin in *The Talisman*.

In this paper, I analyze Scott's portrayal of Saladin to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the Scott's work and to more accurately understand his influence on public perceptions of the Crusades. I will argue that Scott used Saladin as a model for his vision of chivalry. Saladin is a complex character in *The Talisman* and has flaws, but he fulfilled Scott's primary requirements of a refined and chivalrous warrior. Also, attention to the epic's depiction of Saladin reveals that Scott's image of the Muslim leader is directly rooted in the works of a number of the author's European predecessors and contemporaries. Furthermore, growing interest in the Crusades and Saladin in the nineteenth-century played a significant role in Scott's decision to utilize this topic in *The Talisman*. Finally, I contend that while Scott knew his portrayal of Saladin was fictional, he believed that the depiction was an entirely plausible one that was grounded in historical fact. All of these factors collectively reveal that Scott was motivated by a desire to create a historically believable character, but one with which he could take certain artistic liberties. Analysis of Scott's novel *The Talisman* and his depiction of Saladin offers us an intimate look into an important example of Western literature that helped mold a lasting image for popular audiences of medieval Muslims and their role in the Crusades.

The Talisman recounts the adventures of the fictional Scottish crusader Sir Kenneth of the Leopard (who is later revealed to be Prince David, the brother of the King of Scotland) on the Third Crusade. The story begins as Sir Kenneth is traveling alone to a crusader camp in the Levantine desert where the King of England, Richard the Lionheart, has been incapacitated by a prolonged illness; Richard and the crusaders are engaged in a war against the Kurdish Sultan Saladin and his Muslim army. Sir Kenneth is compelled to interact peacefully with and to engage two central Muslim characters on his journey. These two primary Muslim characters are later revealed to be Saladin himself, in elaborately planned and executed disguises. Saladin's first disguise is as a Muslim emir with whom Sir

¹ Elizabeth Siberry, *The New Crusaders: Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000), 112.

² James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics and Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12-13.

³ Alice Chandler, "Chivalry and Romance: Scott's Medieval Novels," *Studies in Romanticism* 14 (1975), 187.

Kenneth traverses the harsh desert. Sir Kenneth travels with this emir en route to the crusader camp, and along the way, the Christian knight learns that his love interest, (the fictional) Lady Edith of Plantagenet, is traveling with the Queen of England to the crusader outpost. Once Sir Kenneth arrives at the camp, he meets Saladin in a second disguise; a Moorish physician allegedly sent by Saladin himself, to help cure King Richard's ailment as a token of good will. While Richard is recovering from his illness, he has to contend with bickering crusade leaders and the schemes of two elites, the Grand Master of the Templars and Conrade [sic] of Montferrat, both of whom want to derail the crusade for personal gain. Meanwhile, Richard expels Sir Kenneth from the camp because Kenneth left his guard post unattended in order to meet with Lady Edith. Sir Kenneth is ashamed by his failure of duty, but his honor is redeemed by the end of the novel when a de-cloaked Saladin demonstrates to Richard that Sir Kenneth was treacherously lured away from his guard post at the command of the Grand Master and Conrade. Richard realizes that he is being undermined by his own allies, but is also impressed by Saladin's commitment to justice and honor, so he decides to abandon the crusade.

Even though the pious crusaders are engaged in holy war against the Muslims of the Levant, the book consistently portrays Saladin as noble, honorable, and chivalrous towards his Christian counterparts. He is depicted as intelligent, restrained, mysterious, and an administrator of fair and reasoned justice. Saladin, both in and out of his various covers, is portrayed in a much more positive light than many of the Christian characters. Richard is a noble fighter and leader, but his reason is debilitated by a fierce rage which clouds his judgment. Sir Kenneth is depicted as a Scottish crusade hero, but displays difficulty balancing his commitment to military duty with his chivalrous obligation to his noble lady. The positive portrayal of Saladin may appear puzzling to some readers, but Scott's motivations and decisions relating to why he crafted Saladin this way become clearer as we fully analyze this topic.

Scott's contributions to British perceptions of the Crusades in the nineteenth-century are noteworthy and have not been ignored by scholars in history and literature. His works have been examined extensively over the years, and the most pervasive conclusion about Scott's work was that Scott romanticized history in his novels.⁴ They say that Scott was unhappy with the state of nineteenth-century British society and used history and nostalgic sentiments in his novel for the purpose of constructing an ideal model to strive for in his society. Scott was a leading figure of Romantic literature, so this argument may be relatively easy to accept on the surface. Proponents of this argument focus on Scott's culture, the political landscape surrounding him, and how his world-vision and biases contributed to a romanticized version of history in his novels. This idea extends to Scott's works with the Crusades and his depiction of Saladin. These scholars believe that Scott's portrayals of the Crusades and Saladin were primarily shaped by Scott's contemporary concerns and had less to do with historical truth. These scholars offer important points about Scott's passions and ideologies and how these may have motivated and influenced his writings. However, they place too much emphasis on how Scott's society influenced his writing.

⁴ James Anderson, *Sir Walter Scott and History: with other papers* (Edinburgh: The Edina Press, 1981), 107-108.

Scholars of Romantic literature have analyzed Scott's work and take special note of how the political landscape and social dynamics of the era influenced it. Andrew Lincoln has explored Scott's motivations for working with historical fiction concluding that "Scott's turn to history is motivated by his concern to encourage a pragmatic acceptance of the modern British state without engaging directly in the constitutional issues raised by radicals and reformers."⁵ Scott lived a comfortable social and economic existence, and Lincoln argues that the author used his fiction to deliver a message of retaining the constitutional status quo of nineteenth-century Great Britain rather than engaging in overt political activism. Lincoln also examines Scott's identity as a Scottish national and how that may have influenced his views on Muslims. He claims that the novelist was acutely aware of the general sense in Britain of English superiority over the Scottish, and this caused him to display some sympathy toward his Muslim characters. Lincoln does concede that Scott still probably felt some sense of superiority over those in the Orient, resulting in a somewhat ambivalent depiction of the cultural differences between Christians and Muslims in his novels.⁶ Lincoln provides some fascinating and valuable perspectives regarding how Scott's culture influenced his work, but ignores how literature and historical texts affected his perceptions of Muslims and Saladin. Scott's political culture and ideology may have influenced the topics he chose to write about, however Scott diligently researched the historical events and peoples included in his novels. Therefore, it is imperative to carefully analyze both Scott's worldview along with his historical research in order to acquire a more complete understanding of Scott's depiction of Saladin.

Another scholar who has commented on Scott's portrayal of Muslims was Edward Said in his famous text, *Orientalism*. Said advances a harsh critique of Scott's depiction of Muslims. He proposes in his book that nineteenth and twentieth-century European scholars and intellectuals, including Scott, unfairly depicted those who lived in the Orient (now referred to as the Middle East) as part of a backward, inferior, and stagnant society. In *Orientalism*, Said analyzes a passage from *The Talisman* describing Saladin's heritage, which proposes the idea that the Kurds are direct descendants of Satan. Said concludes from this passage that Scott may present a positive image of Saladin at times in *The Talisman*, but that it is always clouded by a sense of Muslim inferiority, because no matter how chivalrous Saladin's exploits, he can never overcome his Oriental roots.⁷ Said makes some legitimate points about Scott's depiction of Saladin, but his analysis is incomplete and overlooks some important points. As has been offered previously, there is evidence that Scott most likely felt that Islam was an inferior religion to Christianity, but he did not always portray Islam negatively in *The Talisman*. Overall, Scott's portrait of Saladin is far more intricate and multi-faceted than Said indicates.

These literary scholars have demonstrated that Scott's writing was not entirely immune to his particular biases, however, they are mistaken to conclude that Scott romanticized history in *The Talisman*. A few modern historians have analyzed Scott's historical fiction, and they argue that while Scott was not writing pure history, he did not romanticize the past. James Anderson argues that Scott was fair in his treatment of historical events and persons; Scott had no particular reverence for the past and he simply

⁵ Andrew Lincoln, *Walter Scott and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 5.

⁶ Lincoln, *Modernity*, 91.

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 101-102.

used it to re-tell old stories.⁸ Anderson notes that Scott valued original sources, but was more concerned with historical detail and not precision, which is one reason Scott was drawn to historical fiction.⁹ Anderson's analysis is broad in nature and focuses primarily on Scott's historical depictions in general, but he does briefly discuss *The Talisman* and Scott's portrayal of Saladin. Anderson argues that Richard is depicted as "decidedly inferior" to Saladin in the novel which echoes the views of the influential eighteenth-century historians Hume and Robertson.¹⁰ Elizabeth Siberry, the aforementioned Crusade historian, has extensively studied Scott's role in shaping popular perceptions of the Crusades. When Siberry discusses *The Talisman*, she primarily focuses on how the novel influenced nineteenth-century European society and the popular perceptions of the Crusades in that era. She contends that *The Talisman* affected countless nineteenth-century readers, along with a number of historians, painters, and composers of that era. Siberry states that Scott offered these readers a captivating image of the Crusades, and some nineteenth-century artists later took Scott's portrayal of characters, such as Saladin, and romanticized them in their own works.¹¹

Anderson and Siberry offer a refreshing new perspective on Scott's work with history and successfully undermine the notion that Scott romanticized history. Unfortunately, this approach to Scott's historical fiction has only been seriously studied by these scholars, and their analysis is limited primarily to how Scott depicted British and European Crusade history. Only a brief examination of Scott's portrayal of Saladin has been produced. Saladin was the most recognizable Muslims of the Crusades and most likely one of the few Muslims that the nineteenth-century European public would have known. Scott's portrayal of Saladin in *The Talisman* was one of the most prominent depictions of a Muslim from the Crusades to nineteenth-century readers. Therefore, my work will provide a thorough analysis of Scott's depiction of Saladin in order to fully review this topic, and strengthen our understanding of Scott's work.

Scott was deeply captivated by the tradition of chivalry for both its appearance in the histories he read and for its literary potential in his works of fiction. He even wrote a text on the subject, titled *Essay on Chivalry*, where he explores the history of chivalry, its uses, and its importance.¹² Therefore, it is not surprising that Scott revisited and probed this subject in *The Talisman*. Chivalry is a near omnipresent force in *The Talisman*, and Scott seems to have viewed the Crusades themselves as a collective act of chivalry. In one passage, he describes the crusaders as, "a host composed of different nations, complexions, languages, arms, and appearances, but all fired, for the time, with the holy yet romantic purpose of rescuing the distressed daughter of Zion from her thralldom, and redeeming the sacred earth, which more than mortal had trodden, from the yoke of the unbelieving pagan."¹³ What is intriguing about this passage is that one of the most chivalrous characters in *The Talisman* is actually Saladin – who falls into Scott's category of "unbelieving pagan." This may initially seem bizarre or even paradoxical, but as one investigates Scott's portrayal of Saladin in the context of his historical knowledge, his

⁸ Anderson, *Scott and History*, 107-108.

⁹ Anderson, *Scott and History*, 7.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Scott and History*, 97.

¹¹ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 122-128, 130.

¹² Walter Scott, *Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and The Drama* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1887), 1-65.

¹³ Walter Scott, *The Talisman* (USA: Feather Trail Press, 2009), 140.

beliefs about Muslims, and how he interpreted chivalry, we see how Scott's Saladin is no accident and follows logically given his influences.

Scott researched and pondered the historical development and practice of chivalry, and from that information, developed a clear definition of it. He traced the development of chivalry from its origins in Germanic tribes under the Roman Empire to nineteenth-century Britain.¹⁴ Ultimately, his vision of a chivalric person was a man who had worked and earned military distinction, and could "blend military valour with the strongest passions which acute the human mind, the feelings of devotion and those of love."¹⁵ This special brand of warrior fought for the love of his lady and for the love of his God, and when called upon, he also fought for his sovereign.¹⁶ Virtue and honor were key features of a chivalrous knight, and Scott claimed that:

Generosity, gallantry, and an unblemished reputation, were no less necessary ingredients in the character of a perfect knight. He was not called upon simply to practice these virtues when opportunity offered, but to be sedulous and unwearied in searching for the means of exercising them, and to push them without hesitation to the brink of extravagance, or even beyond it.¹⁷

These are lofty ideals for any man to aspire to and Scott was well aware of this. Scott cherished the theory of chivalry, but in his studies he saw that the institution was more than often corrupted. He elicited little sympathy to the many warriors who failed their chivalric duties.¹⁸ However, Scott did find historical figures in his research who were able to meet the requirements of a chivalrous knight, and Saladin was one of these men. Scott's depiction of Saladin in *The Talisman* fulfills the conditions of a chivalrous knight because Saladin displays legitimate religious piety, exceptional military honor, and treasures a fair Christian lady.

When Scott asserted that a chivalric knight fought for the love of his God, it is highly unlikely that he was referring to any deity other than the Christian notion of God. For this reason, it may appear that a Muslim, such as Saladin, is immediately disqualified from Scott's definition of chivalrous. However, a careful analysis of the text reveals that this is not the case. In one passage of the novel, Sir Kenneth expresses genuine respect for Saladin's piety and devotion to Islam when Saladin and some Muslim soldiers were praying. Sir Kenneth was "offended by seeing his companion in that which he considered as an act of idolatry, [but] could not help respecting the sincerity of their misguided zeal, and being stimulated by their fervor to apply supplications to Heaven in a purer form."¹⁹ In another section, Saladin is portrayed as more respectful and honorable than Sir Kenneth in an argument over religion. In this particular scene, Sir Kenneth loses his temper and insultingly calls the Prophet Muhammad a "camel-driver of Mecca." The passage continues as follows:

¹⁴ Scott, *Essays on Chivalry*, 2-4.

¹⁵ Scott, *Essays on Chivalry*, 4.

¹⁶ Scott, *Essays on Chivalry*, 4-5.

¹⁷ Scott, *Essays on Chivalry*, 5.

¹⁸ Scott, *Essays on Chivalry*, 8-10.

¹⁹ Scott, *The Talisman*, 131.

An electrical shock of passion thrilled through the form of [Saladin]; but it was only momentary, and the calmness of his reply had both dignity and reason in it, when he said "Slander not him whom thou knowest not...let us leave to mollahs [sic] and to monks to dispute about the divinity of our faith."²⁰

This passage demonstrates that a Muslim character in *The Talisman* can be portrayed positively when religion is involved – even at the direct expense of making a Christian character look disrespectful and ignoble. Saladin may not have ascribed to the correct religion, in Scott's opinion, but the way Saladin is depicted handling religious matters and displaying genuine piety suggests that he still qualifies as chivalrous.

One of the most important aspects of Scott's vision of a chivalric knight was a man who displayed remarkable military skills, and Scott's depiction of Saladin is a prime model of this feature. Scott introduces Saladin as the disguised Muslim emir in the first chapter of *The Talisman*, and presents him as a powerful warrior.²¹ Sir Kenneth is traveling through the desert on his steed, and spots the emir in the distance. The mounted emir advances armed and ready, and so Scott has constructed an image of two warriors who are equal in demeanor and skill. This scene sets the stage for how Scott wants to portray Saladin throughout the novel – a commanding fighter who can hold his own with the best that the crusader contingent can offer. The true extent of Saladin's military valor is displayed in one of the final scenes of the novel. Saladin has just learned that the Grand Master has murdered Conrade in order to cover up their plot against Richard. Saladin cannot let this injustice go unpunished and takes decisive action – "the sabre of Saladin left its sheath as lightning leaves the cloud. It was waved in the air, and the head of the Grand Master rolled to the extremity of the tent."²² This scene demonstrates Saladin's formidable physical capabilities in frank terms. What makes this a truly chivalrous act, however, was that Saladin had witnessed a number of the Grand Master's previous crimes, but did not take action because the situations did not call for fighting, and a chivalrous fighter only kills when absolutely necessary. Saladin executed the Grand Master in order to protect the innocent Richard. Even though Saladin was at war with Richard and the crusaders, he would only accept an honorable victory – not to win by the schemes of ignoble traitors.

Scott's model of a chivalrous knight is a man who fights as a testament to the love of his lady, and not only does Saladin pursue a love interest, he desires to make a noble Christian woman his queen. While stationed at the crusader camp, Sir Kenneth learns from the Moorish physician that Saladin has engaged talks with Richard, and proposed a marriage alliance with Lady Edith. Sir Kenneth is enraged and heartbroken that his love may be married off to another man, but feels hopeless because he has no say in the matter. Of course, the physician is actually Saladin in disguise, and listens to and is moved by Sir Kenneth's impassioned expression of love for Lady Edith. As a result, Saladin revokes his proposal of marriage to Lady Edith and proclaims that Sir Kenneth's

²⁰ Scott, *The Talisman*, 19.

²¹ Scott, *The Talisman*, 11-13.

²² Scott, *The Talisman*, 172.

passion had existed ere my wishes had been formed – and, I must now add, is likely to survive them. I cannot, in honour, revenge me for my disappointment on him who had no hand in it. Or, if this high-borne dame loved him better than myself, who can say that she did not justice to a knight of her own religion, who is full of nobleness?

Saladin's actions are doubly chivalrous in this particular situation. As sultan of a powerful army, he has his pick of any Muslim women, but chooses a noble Christian woman instead. Furthermore, when Saladin realizes that Sir Kenneth is genuinely in love with Lady Edith, Saladin selflessly relinquishes his proposal and allows true love to prevail. Saladin goes above and beyond what is required of a noble knight, and that is what makes him truly chivalrous. Scott may have thoroughly studied chivalry and its occurrences in history, but was he just romanticizing Saladin's virtues in order to create a compelling story? The next section addresses the particular sources Scott used to form his depiction of Saladin, and demonstrates that Scott's portrayal is fundamentally rooted in the historical image of Saladin.

The Talisman uses authentic people from history and is set during a real historical period. To provide his story with a sense of verisimilitude, Scott read extensively and was trained with the contemporary scholarly works of history. He even consulted a number of primary sources in their original language.^{23;24} Scott's depiction of Saladin is motivated and derived from these written sources. This section will relate the details of how European perspectives of Saladin and the Crusades developed from the Middle Ages up until Scott's era, and how this, in part, inspired Scott to make use of these topics in *The Talisman*.

The Third Crusade was an important event to the peoples of Europe during the Middle Ages, and it induced contemporary chroniclers to carefully analyze the events and actors involved – including the primary crusader opponent, Saladin. Saladin and his armies were able to recapture the city of Jerusalem in 1187 from the crusaders, and successfully ward off the massive Christian contingent formed during the Third Crusade – who returned to Europe with few Christian land acquisitions to show for their substantial efforts. One may be inclined to assume that such a foe was reviled and hated among medieval Europeans for these reasons, but this is not the case. Contemporary European observers and writers almost universally directed all blame or anger at Christian leaders and crusaders for any losses in the Holy Land during the Third Crusade. In fact, Saladin's role in the affair was hardly even discussed, and any time it was, critics stated that Saladin was no more than an instrument of God's divine justice against the sinful Christians.²⁵ Some chroniclers, however, were sympathetic to the crusade leaders and wanted to cast them in a more positive manner, so the contention that Saladin was a noble and worthy adversary eventually started to become a more common European perception of the Kurdish warrior.²⁶ These observers would emphasize Saladin's military valor in order to

²³ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 113.

²⁴ Lincoln, *Modernity*, 21.

²⁵ John V. Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 82-85.

²⁶ Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 85-87, 91-92.

demonstrate that the crusaders lost to a legitimate opponent. This positive portrayal of Saladin evolved to the point where certain writers glorified him and his actions. Some accounts go as far as to give Saladin a strand of European heritage to further praise and legitimize his victories over the Christians.²⁷ Medieval historian John V. Tolan summarized the dominant European perceptions of Saladin as a “bold and brave warrior, humane and gentle captor, generous bestower of lavish gifts, pious and tolerant in religious matters – in short, a model of chivalry.”²⁸ This image of Saladin is remarkably similar to the one presented by Scott in *The Talisman*. Scott did not extensively address, in *The Talisman*, the alleged religious failings of the crusaders like Medieval writers had done. However, he accepted and promoted the positive portrayal of Saladin, which has roots in the ideas of these medieval Europeans.

Naturally, Scott was more familiar with the contemporary accounts of the Crusades and Saladin, so one must analyze those works closely in order to fully comprehend Scott’s influences. The images and perceptions of Saladin crafted by medieval Europeans were ultimately passed down to the writers and historians that Scott studied and utilized. These accounts were taken and modified by these post-Medieval writers, and so European perceptions of Saladin further evolved. The eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries were a time when European Crusade history was starting to be evaluated in a more professional manner. A number of Crusade historians in the eighteenth-century were often critical of the motivations and actions of the crusaders. French Enlightenment writer, Voltaire (1694-1778), contended that the Crusades placed a significant financial strain on Europe, and Scottish historian, William Robertson (1721-1793), called the enterprise “a singular monument of human folly.”²⁹ While the crusaders were criticized by these historians, Saladin was judged in a more positive light. Voltaire praised Saladin’s character for being a model of fortitude and charity.³⁰ Not every historian, however, accepted the argument that the Crusades were an ignoble endeavor, and this is demonstrated in one of the first important Crusade histories of the nineteenth-century, Charles Mills’ *History of the Crusades*. Mills (1788-1826) praised the motivations of the crusaders in general, but did concede that they at times perpetuated unnecessary cruelty against the Muslims.³¹

While historians were offering newer perspectives on the Crusades, society at large became more interested in the Orient and its culture and history. Also, there was an increased European military presence in the Orient, and works regarding medieval Europe were prevalent in popular Romantic literature. Napoleon had invaded Egypt on the eve of the nineteenth-century, and other European powers were looking to expand their political and economic interests in the region.^{32,33} Also, travel to the Levant became a more realistic and popular endeavor in the century for wealthier Europeans. Many of these travelers

²⁷ Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 91, 96-97.

²⁸ Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 80.

²⁹ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 2.

³⁰ Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 70-71, 79.

³¹ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 11.

³² Tyerman, *The Debate*, 106.

³³ Adam Knobler, “Holy Wars, Empires, and the Portability of the Past: The Modern Uses of Medieval Crusades,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (2006): 293-294, 309-310.

focused their attention on Biblical sites, but a few of them were intrigued by Crusade history and even visited the tombs of men like Godfrey of Bouillon and Saladin.³⁴

Increased interest in the Crusades by eighteenth and nineteenth-century historians, politicians, writers, and the public clearly played a role in motivating Scott to write about the Crusades, and more specifically, about Saladin. A more general medieval revival was progressing during Scott's writing career, and he was certainly exposed to this development.³⁵ It is important to know from where Scott's influences originate because his novels were some of the most widely read in nineteenth-century Britain, and even though he worked within the genre of fiction, many of his readers even took his works as historical truth.³⁶ As has been noted a number of times, Scott's general influence has been well-documented. But a question that needs to be more properly addressed is how Scott approached his writing and the stories and characters he developed. A careful consideration and examination of Scott's portrayal of Saladin yields some important inferences into this particular question.

Historical fiction can be a difficult genre to analyze because of the sometimes ambiguous mix of fact and invention, and *The Talisman* certainly falls into this category. Separating individual pieces of information and judging whether they are supposed to be accurate or were a creation of the author's imagination is a monumental challenge. However, when one carefully analyzes Scott's education and background, his thoughts and philosophies about historical fiction, and the particular ways in which he depicts Saladin in *The Talisman*, it is clear that Scott believed his general portrayal of Saladin as historically accurate, and could be backed up by legitimate evidence.

Scott provides an introduction to *The Talisman*, where he briefly describes his approach to the writing, character portrayal, and historical accuracy of the novel. He offers clear descriptions of his methods and they are supported in the text of the novel. Regarding his reasons for choosing the characters Richard and Saladin, Scott states,

The period relating more immediately to the Crusades which I at least fixed upon was that at which the warlike character of Richard I., wild and generous, a pattern of chivalry, with all its extravagant virtues, and its no less absurd errors, was opposed to that of Saladin, in which the Christian and English monarch showed all the cruelty and violence of an Eastern sultan, and Saladin, on the other hand, displayed the deep policy and prudence of a European sovereign, whilst each contended which should excel the other in the knightly qualities of bravery and generosity. This singular contrast afforded, as the author conceived, materials for a work of fiction possessing peculiar interest.³⁷

Here, Scott explains what he believes to be the accurate historical profiles of Richard and Saladin and why he found them intriguing. He follows that by stating that these historical characters are interesting enough to warrant a compelling story narrative. A novel

³⁴ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 64-66.

³⁵ Chandler, "Chivalry and Romance," 187.

³⁶ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 121-122.

³⁷ Scott, *The Talisman*, 4.

requires intimate character portrayals and specific dialogue, so Scott knew he would have to fill in some of the blanks by using his imagination, but this remark demonstrates that he wants to remain true to these characters' basic historical traits. Scott could have just put this statement in his introduction because he wanted his readers to think that he was historically accurate, but he actually worked diligently throughout the novel to cite historians and provide commentary regarding historical background information. For example, in the novel, Saladin proposes an offer of marriage to Lady Edith. After this information is divulged, Scott offers an aside to the reader,

[This may appear so extraordinary and improbable a proposition that it is necessary to say such a one was actually made. The historians, however, substitute the widowed Queen of Naples, sister of Richard, for the bride, and Saladin's brother for the bridegroom... See MILL'S History of the Crusades, vol. ii., p. 61].³⁸

This passage shows that Scott was informed about the historical context of the Crusades, and wanted to give the reader an accurate portrayal. Given the genre he was working in, he was not necessarily concerned with getting every fact correct, but he did believe that the events in his novel *could* have happened. Another intriguing aspect of this passage is that Scott cited a contemporary crusade history to bolster his legitimacy. Scott specifically cited historian Charles Mills a number of times in the text, British historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), and another British historian G. P. R. James (1799-1860).³⁹ Scott's thorough work seems to have paid some dividends because a number of nineteenth-century historians even praised the quality, extent, and accuracy of his historical descriptions.⁴⁰ Whether or not Scott's portrayal of Saladin and the Crusades in general can actually be considered historically accurate is the topic of another paper. However, Scott was convinced that he was presenting a realistic Saladin to his reader and whose general character traits were consistent with the image presented by what were considered to be legitimate historical sources of that era.

The Talisman has endured the test of time, and continues to provide readers with an engaging vision of the Crusades and the peoples involved in that holy struggle. The people of Europe's relationship and attitudes toward the study of history were undergoing significant changes in the nineteenth-century, and Scott was an integral part of this transformation. The study of his methods, ideas, and ultimate depiction of Saladin offers us a unique look into the mind a literary icon and the way the Crusades were perceived in the nineteenth-century. The study of modern popular perceptions of Muslims in the Crusades is in its infancy, and there are a number of areas that need further review. Recent popular artistic works, such as the movie, *Kingdom of Heaven*, demonstrate that interest in the Crusades is still strong. As Western perceptions of Muslims in the Crusades evolve, it is vital to continue to explore how these perceptions have developed over time.

³⁸ Scott, *The Talisman*, 91.

³⁹ Scott, *The Talisman*, 4, 6, 9, 67, 91.

⁴⁰ Siberry, *The New Crusaders*, 122.

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES

Scott, Walter. *Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama*. London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1887.

Scott, Walter. *The Talisman*. USA: Feather Trail Press, 2009.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Anderson, James. *Sir Walter Scott and History: with other papers*. Edinburgh: The Edina Press, 1981.

Chandler, Alice. "Chivalry and Romance: Scott's Medieval Novels." *Studies in Romanticism* 14 (1975): 185-200.

Chandler, James. *England in 1819: The Politics and Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Knobler, Adam. "Holy Wars, Empires, and the Portability of the Past: The Modern Uses of Medieval Crusades." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (2006): 293-325.

Lincoln, Andrew. *Walter Scott and Modernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Siberry, Elizabeth. *The New Crusaders: Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000.

Tolan, John V. *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008.

Tyerman, Christopher. *The Debate on the Crusades*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.